

*The Folly and Danger of conforming
to the World.*

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT A
MONTHLY EXERCISE

AT
The Rev. Mr. REYNOLDS's Meeting-Place,
near *Cripplegate*,

MARCH 21, 1771.

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Published at the Request of the Ministers and others
who heard it.

L O N D O N;

Printed by R. H E T T;

And sold by J. BUCKLAND, in Pater-Noster-Row; G. KEITH,
in Gracechurch-Street; W. HARRIS, in St. Paul's Church-
Yard; and R. BISHOP, near Leicester-Fields.

M.DCC.LXXI.



R O M. xii. 2.

And be not conformed to this world:—

O F all the distinctions which have obtained among mankind, none is so important, so interesting and so necessary, as that of *the men of the world*, and *the men of God*. A distinction which hath existed from the beginning; and which consists not in forms and appearances, but in reality and truth: a distinction which respects the temper of our hearts and the conduct of our lives. The men of the world are those who, having received the spirit of the world, indiscriminately conform to its customs and usages, and vehemently pursue its profits and pleasures——pursue them as their portion, their heaven, their all. The men of God, on the other hand, are those who, being *dead to the world*, to use the language of Scripture, are *alive unto God*, make his favor their

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chief happiness, and a conformity to his will, upon the noblest principles, their main concern. Now the majority lies very considerably on the side of the world: from whence it follows, that he who will be truly religious must needs be singular. And singularity, whatever substantial reasons there may be to justify it, is a very disagreeable thing; especially in the present case, since human nature is in a depraved state, and we are all unduly attached to sensible objects. To dare to be singular in our opinions requires resolution; but to dare to be so in our practice requires still more resolution. To maintain the truth with constancy, amidst the vain speculations and subtile reasonings of artful men, is hard; but to maintain a temper and conduct chaste, spiritual and heavenly, amidst the surrounding allurements of a gay and thoughtless world, is still harder.

Since, therefore, this is a matter of such vast importance and attended with so many difficulties, we need frequently be animated to it, by all the motives which that divine religion we profess and believe so largely furnishes. And surely it must be acknowledged,
that

that this is a time wherein exhortations of this sort are peculiarly seasonable: a time of prosperity, and therefore very unfavorable to religious singularity; and a time wherein many, who would think it hard was the sincerity of their profession called in question, yet are not easily to be distinguished from the world, which is at an irreconcilable enmity with it. If the primitive Christians, amidst the frowns of persecution, which have a tendency to excite fervor and resolution in religion, stood in need of the caution in our text; we certainly stand in greater need of it, who are powerfully invited into the embraces of the world, by the mighty charms and persuasions of ease, plenty, liberty and prosperity. To us therefore may we consider the Apostle, yea, even our Divine Master himself, as saying with peculiar warmth and earnestness—*Be not conformed unto this world.* This then is the subject I would now attempt to explain and improve among you. And may God of his infinite mercy grant, that it may have its suitable influence on each of our minds!

The caution in our text very naturally and instructively follows the exhortation in the preceding verse, with which the Apostle introduces the applicatory part of his epistle. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service*^a. Here we see the Christian persuaded, by the divine mercies displayed in the gospel of Jesus, to make a tender of himself, his body and soul, his interests and abilities both natural and spiritual, unto God. From a man of the world we see him become a man of God. And how just, how seasonable, the caution that follows! *And be not conformed to this world.* “To God you have surrendered
 “yourself; be henceforth therefore a follower of him, and not of the world.
 “Let the time past of your life suffice you
 “to have wrought the will of the Gentiles; and now no longer live the rest of
 “your time in the flesh, to the lusts of
 “men, but to the will of God^b.”

^a Ver. 1.^b 1 Pet. iv. 2, 3.

In discoursing of the text I shall,

I. Shew you what this caution of the Apostle supposes;

II. In a few words explain it; and,

III. Consider the reasonableness and importance of it.

I. What does this caution of the Apostle suppose? It supposes — that the way, the manner or the course, of this world is very bad — that Christians, nevertheless, are too prone to conform to it — and that there is great danger attending such conduct. You will excuse me, if I here insist particularly on the two first of these, as they are considerations which, rightly understood, will prepare the way for what is to follow.

First, It is taken for granted that the way, the manner, the course of this world is very bad.

And which of us is there, who knows any thing of the world, but will readily acknowledge that this is the fact? What

scenes of avarice and oppression, deceit and falshood, malice and revenge, pride and vanity, vice and debauchery, does this earthly globe, yea every part of it, exhibit to our view ! How variously are the passions of men agitated ! What divers characters do they assume ! And what different parts do they act on the stage of life ! Some we see contending for power and dominion, some for honour and applause, some for wealth and riches, and some for sensual pleasures and gratifications ; and each in order to compass his ends, exhausting all the force of art, ingenuity, attention, labour and influence. Here we shall see one putting on the mask of friendship and affection, to allure and deceive ; another secretly undermining his neighbour's reputation and good name ; another defrauding him of his substance, by open violence, by wilful perjury, or by private art and collusion ; another grinding the poor ; another courting the great ; another seducing the innocent ; yea another, horrible to behold ! imbruing his hands in human blood. Shall I tell you of the thousands slain in the field, to gratify the pride, ambition and power of princes ?

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Shall I describe to you the flattery and adulation, the faithless vows and promises, and the numerous intrigues and policies which prevail in courts? Shall I say what schemes are contriving, and what measures are daily executing, among men of trade and business, to compass their unlawful designs and avaritious purposes? Shall I point to the secret recesses of lewdness and debauchery, and tell you of the wantonness, folly and luxury that are to be found there? Shall I remind you of the feuds and animosities of public bodies of men, of the quarrels and contentions of families, and of the extravagance and gaiety, the avarice and selfishness of individuals? In short, were it in my power to lead you into the hearts of men, those secret chambers of imagery; to give you a history of the passions, their rise, progress and effect; and to shew you the abominations of fraud, perfidy, dissimulation, pride, envy, lust, malice and revenge, that have been perpetrated on the wide theatre of this earth, among all ranks and orders of men, privately and openly, and under all shapes and appearances, how would you stand astonished!

ed!—Such then is the way of the world, such the temper and spirit of the greater part of mankind, whatever restraints knowledge, education, decency and the authority of human laws, may have in some instances laid upon their conduct! But it is not my design, nor am I able, to give you a complete picture of the world: you have only the outlines of it. Yet with me surely you will acknowledge, from this general view of it, that its form is hideous and detestable.

And such the world hath been from the beginning, I mean ever since the apostacy of our first parents. What a miserable appearance does the old world make in history! It stood a long while, and was very full of inhabitants: but we have little else told us concerning it, except its wickedness, that *the wickedness of man was great, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*; and again, that *God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth*^c. They seem to have risen to the greatest heights of impiety imaginable; for

^c Gen. iv. 5. 12.

the Apostle Peter calls them emphatically, *The world of the ungodly*^d. And the contagion of vice and evil example seems to have taken a universal spread; for it is remarkable that we read of but four good men between Adam and Noah; and that was a period of upwards of a thousand years. The course of the world was then surely very bad.

But was it better afterwards? Perhaps when light increased the manners of men might change; at least decency and civility might more generally prevail. But alas! we read of little of this down to the time of Moses, and the erection of the Israelites into a separate nation in the land of Judea. And though through their means, under the blessing of God, the doctrine of morality was better understood than it had been before; yet mankind for the most part discovered the same depraved disposition, and ran into the same corrupt practices they had formerly done. Yea the Jews themselves, though distinguished by the peculiar advantages of a divine revelation and an extraordinary providence, soon became infamous for their pride, hypocrisy, impiety and unbelief.

^d 2 Pet. ii. 5.

So that the Psalmist complained in his time, that among them as well as the Gentiles, there were *none righteous no not one*; that *none sought after God, none did good, but all were gone out of the way*; that *their throat was an open sepulchre, that their tongues used deceit, that their mouth was full of cursing and their feet swift to shed blood*; that *destruction and misery was in their ways, and the fear of God was not before their eyes*°.

And how it was when our Saviour appeared on the earth, both sacred and profane history largely testifies. *The whole world, the Apostle John tells us, lay in wickedness, overwhelmed with ignorance, guilt and misery*†. The prince of the power of the air had extended his dominion far and wide, and both Jews and Gentiles were all agreed in their subjection to him. The like abominable and diabolical practices, though in some places perhaps more subtilly refined and cloathed in a more decent habit, every where prevailed. And, whatever effect the Gospel might have where it was preached, and however the works of the devil, the

° Compare Rom. iii. 9.—18. with Ps. xiv. liii. &c.
† 1 John v. 19.

established institutions of idolatry and superstition, were in many countries shaken and destroyed, yet, in a few countries, Satan seemed to have almost entirely recovered his former power, and those very nations where the gospel had been received returned again to his allegiance. So that for a long course of years the world was as ignorant, stupid and wicked as ever, except a small remnant in some remote corners of the earth, who kept their garments from defilement, and maintained the Gospel in its genuine purity. And after this, when the light of the reformation shone upon the world, and apostolic times again returned; how soon did these and the other nations, which had reaped such singular advantages from that extraordinary, I had almost said miraculous, interposition of divine power; how soon, I say, did they again relapse into their former evil customs and practices, though not into the like degree of ignorance and superstition! And if we look around us and inquire into the present state of things among us, must we not acknowledge that, amidst all the light and liberty we enjoy, the course of the world is much

the same as it hath been all along? Mankind are still governed by the same maxims, the same prejudices, the same passions. They are now, the generality of them, as sensual, worldly and diabolical in their temper and practice as ever. They are all pursuing the same ends, and many of them scarcely held within the bounds of decency even by human laws, enforced by the most severe sanctions. Yea, under the mask of religion, what villany and wickedness is perpetrated in our land! Such then is the course of the world, so it always hath been, so it is, and so it always will be, I fear, to the end. And this is what, in the first place, the text supposes. It supposes also,

Secondly, That Christians are too prone to conform to the world. I mean not that good men are in any great danger of copying after the world, in those flagrant instances of vice which have been just now mentioned; though even from these, when assaulted with sudden and violent temptation, they had need of the grace of God to secure them. But, what I mean is an unwarrantable approach towards the world, an
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inconsiderate compliance with such modes and usages of it as are of a sinful and pernicious tendency, and some taints, though but partial, of its defilement, and which I shall by and by more particularly explain. Of this evil there is great danger, and we cannot but be sensible of it from our own experience, and from daily observation on thousands around us, of whom, however, we would hope better things than that they are mere nominal professors of religion. Now from whence does this danger arise, which gives occasion to the caution in our text? Why,

1. From that *depravity* of nature, which though in a good measure corrected and subdued, is common to them with others. There are the same seeds of folly and sin in Christians as in the rest of mankind; and they are continually springing up in their breasts, to the great detriment of their peace and comfort, and their purity and usefulness. Which of us can say he is wholly free from pride, ambition, envy, lust, and other irregular inclinations? The grace of God does not absolutely and entirely extirpate these passions out of the human

man heart, but permits them, like the beasts in Daniel, to live while it deprives them of their dominion. And of consequence there will be a propensity to conform, at least in some instances, to the world; the injurious effects of which we shall hereafter consider. Great danger arises also,

2. From the *peculiar situations* and connexions of some Christians. We are all more or less connected with the world, and with the men of it: but there are some who are obliged to converse more intimately with it than others. Their affairs unavoidably lead them into an extensive acquaintance with the customs and manners of the times. They are under a necessity, how much soever against their inclination, to be the spectators of many sad scenes of pride, gaiety and wantonness, of fraud, dissimulation and iniquity. And, as the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, it is ever in danger of catching fire from the sparks of sin thus continually flying around it. They who live therefore in the midst of a perverse and adulterous generation, had need use great caution to keep their garments from defilement.

3. Good-

3. *Good-nature* proves also a snare to many, and is a just ground for the caution in the text. A free, courteous, affable behaviour is very commendable, and not a little ornamental to religion. Nay religion teaches it: it forbids moroseness and severity, and warmly inculcates a spirit of generosity, kindness and love. But then it often happens, that as good-nature and complaisance, when carried to an excess, make a very near approach to insincerity and dishonesty, so they betray persons into undue compliances with the world. How many, through easiness of temper, have sacrificed their immortal souls as well as their temporal interests, to a fond desire of pleasing men, and of being upon fair terms with the world! Their good-nature hath robbed them of their resolution, and so laid them open, thus defenceless, to the sudden attack of every little temptation. Indeed the grace of God, where it hath taken possession of the heart, will lay such restraints upon natural temper as to secure it from these very dangerous excesses. But still there are many instances wherein good men themselves, through a fear of offend-
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ing, and an unwillingness to contradict, have unhappily been guilty of compliances very unbecoming their character. There are seasons when it is our indispensable duty boldly to assert the cause we profess, and with steadiness to oppose the folly and wantonness of others. But how apt are we on these occasions to yield, if not to considerations of worldly prudence and policy, yet to the dictates of false tenderness and a disinclination to give pain! Good-nature therefore should be watched, lest it become an occasion of undue conformity to the world. To which I will add what is pretty near a-kin to it, and that is,

4. A dislike of *singularity*. This is what I hinted at in the beginning of this discourse. It is hard to row against the stream, hard for one to contend with a thousand. We are not easily persuaded to oppose popular notions, much less popular practices. So we either persuade ourselves, though very falsely, that the right is on the side of the multitude, and that if we are with them we shall do as well as they: or else to avoid the charge of preciseness, we keep our religion as much as we can to ourselves, and

go to the utmost limits conscience will allow us in our conformity to the opinions and manners of those around us. A meanness this unworthy of the brave and spirited character of a genuine Christian! A propensity, however, to it is a ground of the caution in our text.—Thus you see how we become liable to be drawn into an unreasonable and sinful conformity to the world. Again,

Thirdly, The caution supposes danger in such a conformity. And indeed the danger is very great, much greater than, I fear, the generality of Christians imagine. But I forbear to point out the mischief of it in this place, as that will be more properly my business by and by.

Thus have we gone through the first head of discourse, which was to shew what this caution of the Apostle supposes. It supposes — that the world, that is, the course or manner of it, is very bad — that even Christians themselves are liable to be drawn into undue compliances with it: which is the effect of the remaining depravity of their nature; of the particular stations of life which some of them fill; of easiness of natural temper; and of an

aversion to singularity. And then it further supposes—the danger of this conformity to be very great. We proceed now,

II. To explain the caution, and to shew in what sense a Christian may, and in what he may not conform to the world.

First, There are some instances wherein it is very allowable, nay it is the Christian's duty, to conform to the world.

1. In general, to accommodate ourselves to the understandings and tempers of mankind is certainly very right, provided we do not sacrifice truth and conscience to such a conformity. This is what we call good nature, which when carried to excess, as I have just now shewn you, is a great evil, but when held under due restraints, is highly commendable. Surely no one will be so mad as to say, that religion requires us to be ill-natured. I know there are some who under pretence of extraordinary piety, assume a severe, morose, gloomy countenance, and take upon them to quarrel with all around them. But this is a conduct by no means to be justified: on the contrary it is very indecent, and hath done
great

great injury to real religion. It is possible indeed such an appearance and behaviour may in some instances be natural and constitutional : and, where this is the case, it should be the business of religion to restrain and correct it. The same Apostle, who dissuades us from being conformed to the world, bids us *be kind one to another*^g; and, in this very chapter, exhorts us to *be of the same mind one towards another*, and to *condescend to men of low estate*^h. And another Apostle admonishes us to *be courteous*, that is, affable and obligingⁱ. And surely affability, as it is a part of moral virtue, very well consists with Christianity, nay is heightened and improved by it. For what hath such a mighty tendency to soften the heart, and to prompt men to an agreeable obliging carriage towards each other, as the grace and love, the benignity and kindness which breathe through the gospel? Much of this was seen in our blessed Saviour : and whoever is acquainted with the history and writings of the Apostle Paul, must acknowledge that it was in his very nature ; and that it shewed itself on all proper occasions, to the honour of that divine religion he professed. And so,

^g Eph. iv. 32. ^h Verse 16. ⁱ 1 Pet. iii. 8.

2. It is very allowable to conform to the indifferent customs and usages of the country where we dwell. Some indeed have made religion to consist very much in dress, and have insisted that Christians should distinguish themselves by a remarkable plainness and peculiarity of habit. But there seems no just ground for this either in reason or in the word of God. Every one's dress should be agreeable to his rank; and when we go beyond that, we violate the rules of decency, and consequently of religion. There are also some fashions so vain and foolish, I had almost said immodest, that a giddy compliance with them is most certainly a high affront to that sobriety, which the profession of the gospel teaches and enjoins. And I wish there was no ground for complaints of this sort among some who call themselves Christians. But a remarkable singularity in our outward appearance is as unbecoming, as extravagance the other way; since it favors of vanity and affectation, and leads persons to imagine that religion consists in what is wholly foreign to it. Our Saviour took great pains to correct mistakes of this sort among the Jews, and to shew that the

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singularities

singularities of the Pharisees were very offensive in the sight of God, as they were manifestly the effect of pride and ostentation. We may, we ought then to conform to the world in those civil usages and customs, whether of dress or behaviour, which are in themselves decent, and which are wholly indifferent and unexceptionable.

And here a question arises with respect to rites and ceremonies in matters of religion. Are we to conform to such rites, I mean, to those which are merely of human appointment? The answer is, I think, very natural and reasonable, We are not. Christ alone is king in his church. He hath instituted such ordinances and forms of worship, as he hath judged fit and necessary. And to add to them seems at least to carry in it an imputation on his wisdom and authority: and it hath this, I think, unanswerable objection to it, that it opens the door to a thousand innovations (as the history of the church of Rome hath sufficiently shewn) which are not only indifferent in themselves, but highly absurd and extremely detrimental to religion. Besides, if there were nothing else to be said against such a
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conformity, this I think must have great weight with a considerate mind, that when things indifferent come to be imposed and made necessary, they lose their very nature, and are most justly exceptionable.

A conformity then to the tempers of mankind, and to the customs and usages of the country where we dwell, as far as it will consist with decency and a good conscience, is certainly both allowable and commendable: and that for this reason, not only because it is fit in itself, but because it the better enables a Christian to be useful in society and to promote the real interests of religion. It was expressly with this view that the Apostle acted when, as he tells us, *he became all things to all men, that he might by all means save some*^k.—But it is time I now come to shew you,

Secondly, In what senses we ought not to conform to the world.

Now this caution hath a further view, than merely to restrain us from those notoriously vicious and abominable practices, which were mentioned at the beginning of this discourse: for such practices are diametrically opposite to

^k 1 Cor. ix. 22.

the Christian doctrine and profession ; and he who immerses himself into them is confessedly no Christian, and comes more properly under the denomination of a man of the world, than of one who conforms to it. The spirit of the world is in him, and hath a commanding influence on the general course of his life. The meaning of the text therefore is, that we should bear no resemblance to the world, should not be at all *fashioned according* to it, as the original word is elsewhere rendered¹, that we should keep at a distance from the world in our principles, spirit and conduct — that we should not adopt its false maxims and reasonings — that we should not covet its honours, riches and pleasures — that we should not affect to be thought men of the world, studiously endeavour to accommodate ourselves to it, or aim to be held in esteem and reputation by it — that we should not imitate the world in a vain, foolish, sensual temper ; in an idle, frothy, unprofitable conversation ; and much less in a loose, irregular, disorderly behaviour — that we should connect ourselves as little as may be with the world, abstain

¹ συνημιζουσι : 1 Pet. i. 14..

from all appearance of evil, and keep our garments, if possible, from all defilement, pure and unspotted. — Such is the general sense of the caution in the text. And from hence it follows, that there is good ground for the distinction the Apostle elsewhere observes between the ideas of *Lawfulness* and *Expediency*^m. There are a thousand things in the world, in the tempers, customs and manners of mankind, which, however innocent in themselves, are unbecoming a Christian: and these surely it is his wisdom and duty to avoid. Here I might mention many kinds of amusements, which, though generally practised and not absolutely criminal, yet are vain trifling and unmanly, and therefore unchristian: amusements which tend to enervate the mind, dissipate the passions, and cool the heart to the nobler exercises and enjoyments of religion; and to which there is this further unanswerable objection, that however we might not ourselves suffer materially by them, yet our example would have a very ill effect upon others. In respect, therefore, of all these matters, it is the language

^m 1 Cor. x. 23.

of the text, *Be not conformed to the world.*
From whence I now go on,

III. To shew you, as was proposed, the reasonableness and importance of this caution.

It is a caution given us by an inspired Apostle; an Apostle who had a large acquaintance with the world, who well understood mankind, who entered thoroughly into the secret operations and feelings of the human heart, and was no stranger to the imperfections of the best of men, or to the various and powerful temptations with which they are encompassed on every side. It is a caution, I will add, given us by a man endowed with a prophetic spirit, and who clearly foresaw what mighty opposition the world would make in future times, as well as in the infancy of the church, to the Christian doctrine and profession. We are to consider him therefore, as pressing this advice upon us with the same earnestness as upon the Romans. And there is the greater reason for this, as our situation is so similar to theirs who were inhabitants of the fairest, wealthiest and politest city in the whole
E world

world, and therefore exposed to greater danger than most other Christians. You will allow me then to enforce the exhortation with some suitable motives. And here I would remind you,

1. Of what hath been already granted, that this is a very unfit world for a Christian to conform to.

What kind of world it is you have seen. It hath been painted in its true colours, though not with all the shades that might have been cast upon it, nor in all the detestable forms it might have been represented. Look around you and behold the pride, luxury, avarice, fraud, cruelty, and other sensual and diabolical vices and practices which prevail among mankind; and say, whether a Christian, instead of conforming to the world, ought not to shun it as his greatest enemy. How opposite is the general course of the world to the doctrine, spirit and profession of the gospel! Can you conceive of two greater contrarieties in nature? Do not the Scriptures ever set the kingdom of Christ, and that of the world, in opposition to each other? Is not the God of this world, the deter-

determined, the avowed opposer of Christ and his gospel? Are not the people of God always represented as a body distinct and separate from the world? Was it not the professed design of our Saviour's incarnation and death to redeem them from this present evil world? And is it not on account of their different natures, dispositions, tendencies and interests, that the world is every where represented as hating and persecuting them who fear God?—Shall a Christian then conform to this world? Shall he pay his devotion to it? Shall he court its friendship? Shall he imitate it? Shall he affect a similarity to it? No surely. *For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?*

2. As the course of this world is bad, and therefore in its own nature very unfit for a Christian to conform to; so a conformity to it, even in a small degree, is of very hurtful and dangerous consequence.

2 Cor. vi. 14, 15, 16.

It is a passage that may well make the hearts of many under a profession of religion tremble: *Whofoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God*^{*}. Would to God that men would confider it, that they would lay it to heart! How many immortal souls have been ignominiously led away into wretched captivity to this proud, this cruel usurper! Yea, how many have not only been cast down and wounded, but totally ruined and undone by his rage and malice! What a sad list do the Scriptures present us with of some such persons in the primitive times! I might tell you of *Demas*, who, *having loved this present world*^{*}, forsook the Apostle, and it is probable his profession too: and of many others, who through the same cause, *fell into temptation, and a snare, and into various foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition*[†].

And as thus the mere nominal professor of religion hath been subdued and conquered by the world; so the people of God themselves have, many of them, received no small injury from it. By a partial conformity to the world they have lost much

* James iv. 4.

† 2 Tim. iv. 10.

‡ 1 Tim. vi. 9.

of the spirit and pleasure of religion, obstructed their usefulness, disgraced their character, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. If it be difficult for the Christian whose situation *obliges* him to converse with the world, to keep alive in his heart that divine fire which the grace of God hath kindled there; how must the flame languish in his breast, who *unnecessarily* precipitates himself into connections that are vain and foolish, if not absolutely immoral and sinful! Would you frame a just idea of the unhappy condition of that man? Enter into his heart, and see how barren and unfruitful it is. There, where holy desires and spiritual affections once prevailed, little else is to be found but anxiety and care, or wantonness and folly. Go with him into his retirements, and observe how carelessly the private duties of religion are performed, if not wholly neglected. Follow him into the family where he lives, and the company he keeps, and tell us how vain, thoughtless and unprofitable is the general course of his conversation. But, in order yet further to impress your mind with his folly, guilt and misery, view him on his return to God, well consider

sider the bitter pangs his heart feels; and the sorrowful sighs that arise from his inmost soul. Let these be imagined—O! with him feel them; and then say, how evil and bitter a thing it is to forsake God, and to conform to the world. *Ye have not received, Christians, the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God*. Take heed therefore how ye grieve the Holy Spirit; whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption*. Again,

3. Conformity to the world is most unreasonable in a Christian, as it adds weight and influence to the world, and tends greatly to promote its interests among mankind.

This fair and enchanting idol, the world, hath many votaries, who daily sacrifice at her altar, and pay homage at her feet. Their number is far greater than that of the worshippers of the living God; and, though the cause is bad, their zeal to promote it far exceeds that of multitudes who profess the true religion. Now, what more acceptable service, Christian, can you offer to this false deity, than by admitting of an intercommunity of worship with these her blind and miserable votaries, that is, by con-

* 1 Cor. ii. 12.

* Eph. iv. 30.

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forming to the world in the manner I have represented? And will you thus give countenance to a kind of idolatry the most dishonourable to God, and of the most pernicious tendency to men? Will you thus strengthen the interests, and gratify the malice of Satan the prince of darkness? Will you thus affront your Almighty Saviour, who, with his own most precious blood, hath redeemed you from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers? Will you thus wound the hearts, and weaken the hands of your fellow-disciples? In fine, will you thus become accessories to the ruin of thousands around you? Far be it from you. This were a conduct most absurd, disingenuous and ungrateful in you, who are so highly indebted to the grace of God, and have such bright and glorious prospects before you. — To conform to the world, I will add,

4. Is to violate the express precepts, and to deviate from the most illustrious examples, recorded in the book of God.

When the Apostle had been dissuading the Corinthians from this conduct, in a

* 1. Pet. i. 18.

passage already cited, and representing the manifest absurdity and danger of it; he immediately subjoins this authoritative command, with a most gracious and alluring promise annexed to it: *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*^t. To this same command Enoch, Noah, Lot, Moses, and a cloud of other witnesses, whose names are enrolled in the sacred volume, were obedient, instructed in the knowledge of the true God, animated by the exalted hope of his favour through the Messiah, and steeled with that divine fortitude which his grace inspires, they dared to be singular. Neither the frowns nor the flatteries of the world could subdue them. *They endured, seeing him who is invisible; and, having respect to the recompence of reward, chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*^u. Here I might also hold up to your view the characters and lives of the Apostles and primitive Christians, and what is infinitely more

^t 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

^u Heb. xi. 25, 26, 27.

animating,

animating, the bright and perfect pattern of the Son of God himself. — But I forbear. It shall suffice to observe,

5. And lastly, That we are obliged by our own profession and vows to pay a due regard to this Apostolic caution.

When we first put on Christ by baptism, we solemnly renounced the world with all its pomps and vanities. And this was done by *you*, my friends, to whom I more immediately address myself, in your own persons, and not by the medium of sponsors; in your riper years, and not in infancy, when you were utterly incapable of vows and promises. It was done deliberately, and, I trust, under a full conviction that it was both your duty and interest thus to yield yourselves to God. And this your baptismal vow hath been often renewed at the table of Christ, and in other solemn acts of religious worship. Take heed then how you violate such engagements. To fall into practices grossly immoral and vicious, would be base and perfidious indeed! At the very thought of such conduct you tremble. Remember then that a

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conformity to the world in these lesser instances which have been mentioned, is an approach towards that guilt you so much abhor and deprecate. From this topic the Apostle reasons with these very Romans, to whom he addresses the caution in our text, *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*^w.

Thus have I laid before you the grounds of this most important and interesting advice in the text. And what remains now, but that I exhort you and myself with great earnestness and affection to carry it into practice? Let me then address all those divine feelings which are peculiar to you as the disciples of Jesus, and the possessors of his grace—your zeal for the glory of God—your love to your Almighty Saviour—your jealousy for the honour of religion—your generous concern for the real welfare of mankind—and your ardent

^w Rom. vi. 3, 4.

wishes for your own happiness. By these, by each of these, by all these considerations, let me beseech you, brethren, as ye have presented yourselves to God a living and holy sacrifice, that ye would no longer *be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* What objection *can* you have to so reasonable an exhortation? I know of but one; and it would be as great a reflection upon your understanding as upon your piety, to suppose it will have any great weight with you. It is the charge of preciseness and singularity—a charge that will do you real honour. Your Master endured it before you, and was nobly superior to it. Be ye therefore followers of him. And as he hath required you, at the peril of his displeasure, which you of all things dread, to *deny yourselves and take up your cross**; O! be obedient to the divine command. And, that you may the more easily combat the difficulties which lie in the way of your duty, let me further intreat you—to revolve seriously in your breasts the considerations that have been offered—to detach yourselves from all unnecessary con-

* Mat. xvi. 24.

nexions with the vain and thoughtless part of mankind — to make wise and good men your companions — to cry mightily to God for the seasonable restraints and influences of his grace — and to comfort yourselves with the animating prospect of that future happy world, where you, with all the excellent of the earth, shall see God, be like him, and enjoy him for ever.

THE END.

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